

Quadra Feral Cat Group

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NEWS RELEASE / SPECIAL FEATURE SUBMISSION

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Quadra Group Aims to Fix Feral Cat Population
Trap-Neuter Program Launched to Reduce Feral Cat Numbers

She's calling it cat central, and within weeks, this area of Quadra Island could be crawling with even more kitties.

Currently, about 30 cats roam the area bordered by houses near Quadra Elementary and Village Square shopping centre. Most are believed to be feral felines, untamed cats that mainly go unseen - and haven't been spayed or neutered.

"We'll soon be into kitten season and unfixed cats breed, well, almost like rabbits," explains Lara Fraser, who's coordinating the newly-formed Quadra Feral Cat Group.

"More unwanted cats here won't be good for the cats or for the people living and driving in this area," she emphasizes.

Over three years, one cat can be responsible for the birth of 500. "Even with the high mortality rate in feral cats, if we leave things as they are, we'll have more cats over time, and the Quadra Feral Cat Group is working to reduce the birthrate in these cats and do what we can to improve their quality of life," Fraser says.

Fraser invited animal-loving islanders to meet about the growing numbers of feral cat colonies on Quadra after her experience with "a semi-feral waif called Barney."

Barney, a scrawny, black and white cat "showed up one day on my co-worker's doorstep and hung around for almost a year, sleeping at night in an old truck canopy on the ground."

Despite a ready supply of dry cat food, Barney continued to lose weight. "He developed horrible bloody ears, and I gasped when I saw the state he was in," she recalls.

"Life had been very unkind to Barney, but he was still big on charm. I brought him home and made him a part of our family. Funds were donated for his vetcare by many people who had never even met Barney. Sadly, the vet determined that he was just too ill to be saved and it was decided after a few short months that it was more humane to put him to sleep. He was the tiniest of angels who stole my heart, and that experience broke it. I knew I had to do more for these cats," Fraser says.

That led to a search for a way to manage and reduce colonies of unwanted cats on Quadra.

"Feral cats come from pet cats, from abandoned cats and kittens and more unwanted litters of kittens," Fraser says. "The saddest part is, we know we can't save them all. So, we're going to do as much as we can to help as many as we can."

Fraser's call drew a core of more than half a dozen committed volunteers. Others have signed on as an extended network to offer help where they can. Several members, including Fraser, have worked in veterinary clinics.

Since their first meeting mid January, the group has been in touch with feral cat groups in Courtenay, Cowichan and the Sunshine Coast. They've also done extensive Internet searches on the most effective methods to manage feral cat populations, which indicates approximately 85 per cent of cats in a feral colony are not spayed or neutered, and at any given time, approximately 50 per cent of the females will be pregnant. Even with 50 per cent of kittens dying before they're eight weeks old and young mothers often dying from pregnancy complications and poor nutrition, feral cat colonies continue to grow.

"Using a proven and humane method to manage and reduce the feral cat population, we aim to launch a spay/neuter program," explains Julie Douglas, who coordinated a spay/neuter program to manage feral cat colonies on a southern Vancouver Island worksite for six years before moving to Quadra.

"A feral cat in an unmanaged colony has a half-starved, two to three-year life span. By spaying and neutering, the birthrate drops, and fighting and mating behaviour is eliminated, so the cats are less prone to injury and infection. And in a managed colony, any new cats that move in are spotted at monitored feeding stations, and appropriate steps can be taken," Douglas adds. "Trap-neuter-release program statistics indicate that in managed feral cat populations, numbers decrease over time as cats die of naturally."

"One of the most important aspects of our work will be to remind the public about the importance of spaying and neutering pets, and about the effects of dumping unwanted cats and kittens. We're also hoping to advocate a low-cost spay/neuter program for people on reduced income or people otherwise unable to afford this surgery for their pets," says Connie Cooper, one of the group's trapping and transport coordinators.

The Quadra Feral Cat Group has arranged for local veterinarians to provide spay and neuter surgery. The first two females go for spaying this week, preventing the birth of up to 1,000 kittens over the next three years.

"Some of the cats living on their own out there are strays. One of the first cats to visit the vet is a very friendly, lovely long-haired grey cat with stunning green eyes. She loves it when we pet her, and she'll be our first cat available for adoption," says the group's foster network coordinator, Tammy Hagen. "We're also going to try to find foster homes to tame the kittens and turn them into adoptable family pets," she adds.

Adult cats are to be returned to the original location unless a suitable home (or barn or out building) can be found.

"Quadra is a caring community that supports so many causes," Fraser emphasizes. "We're hoping this will be another way to set a good example for local children and do the right thing by animals in need."

(Sidebar) Help Us Help Them

The Quadra Feral Cat Group is ready for another kind of support from animal-loving residents.

"To pay vet costs and provide food for these cats so we can monitor the colonies, we're going to have to raise funds," says the group's treasurer, Janet Massey. "We're trying to give people as many options as possible to support us."

"We already had funding donated to purchase four live traps, and we welcome any other support people can provide," adds the group's fundraising coordinator, Chris Thompson. "Businesses or families can sponsor a cat's surgery to prevent a litter of kittens, or people can donate an hour's pay, or contribute to our 'change for a change' cans on island store counters. We're all volunteers, and everything goes to care for these animals," he emphasizes.

The Quadra Feral Cat Group has opened an account with the Quadra Credit Union and charitable tax receipts can be arranged for donations. The group is eligible for Spirit Board Points at TruValue Foods in Heriot Bay, and people can earmark bottle return funds there in April.

"We've set up an online garage sale on our website. People send a photo of items they'd like to sell and donate all or part of the funds to our group's efforts. We have already posted a long list of thank-yous there because so many people and organizations have assisted to get us started," Thompson says.

"We're also working with local artists to develop art cards, T-shirts and fridge magnets, and we hope to enlist the help of local craftspeople to make cat toys we can sell at the Saturday market," he adds. Knitting patterns for cat nip mice are available at Fun Knits in Quathiaski Cove.

Sherry Peterson is one of many people who've noticed an increasing population of feral cats on Quadra - and a supporter of the feral cat group's efforts.

"Three years ago, a handsome black and white cat with a perfect Charlie Chaplin tuxedo and mustache appeared on our patio. We figured he must be hungry, knowing he didn't belong to anyone nearby, so we began putting out table scraps and he began to trust us," she says. "Long story short, Charlie adopted us, comes inside to sit on laps and be petted, and we treated him for worms and fleas. Then he brought his mate G.G., and they added kittens, and a couple more showed up, so we wondered what to do about all these cats."

When Peterson saw an ad about the feral cat group, she says, "I went to a meeting and found a very well organized group of experienced folks dedicated to solving the problem of abandoned cats breeding colonies on our island. After only three or four meetings, G.G. was taken to a foster home. I understand she'll be spayed in a few days," says Peterson. "They're putting words and ideas into action right away."

For more information, people can contact the Quadra Feral Cat Group at 250-285-3941 or by email at "<mailto:quadracats@yahoo.com>" quadracats@yahoo.com. Check out the group's website at www.quadracats.com

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(Photo Captions - See photos available for download at www.quadracats.com)

- 1-4. Barney, the feral cat that lived briefly as part of Lara Fraser's family, was the impetus for the Quadra Feral Cat Group to work to reduce the number of unwanted cats on Quadra.
5. Gigi, the Quadra Feral Cat Group's first spayed female available for adoption is very friendly.
6. The Quadra Feral Cat group reaching out for help to fill the "change for a change" cans on island store counters. Funds go to spay and neuter feral cats to prevent the birth of more kittens.
7. a/b. Quadra Feral Cat Group creating counter coin cans to collect "change for a change" for the island's feral cats.

8. Lara Fraser at cat central, the neighbourhood around the Quadra Elementary and Village Square where a number of feral cats congregate.

Frequently Asked Questions

How did we end up with all these feral cats?

This is a human-caused problem. Thankfully, there's a human-based solution. Quadra Feral Cat Group is responding with a humane and effective feral cat population management program.

Why feed the cats?

Providing basic food improves quality of life for the cats and allows Quadra Feral Cat Group to monitor feral cat colonies for kittens and newcomers - who'll be trapped and transported to the vet. Where feral cats are providing useful rodent management, fed cats will continue to hunt.

What's involved in trapping?

The Quadra Feral Cat Group aims to notify people in the neighbourhood when traps will be set. Live traps are set at dusk, at the feeding station. A small amount of bait (rich-smelling food like sardines or canned cat food) and water are placed at the end of the trap farthest from the door. When the cat enters the trap to reach the food, its paws trigger the door release and the trap closes. The person monitoring the trap places a blanket or sheet over the trap to calm the cat. The trap is moved to a warm, dry, quiet place, and the cat is transported to the vet the next morning.

Why return the feral cats to their colonies?

Quadra Feral Cat Group aims to coordinate a group of foster homes to tame young kittens for eventual adoption. The group will also try to house and prepare semi-feral or stray cats for adoption. In some cases, semi-feral cats will adapt to being barn cats, and the group is eager to hear from people who'd be suitable hosts for a healthy, fixed semi-feral cat.

Cats are very territorial, and fixed cats that cannot be placed elsewhere will return to their colony. In this location, they will prevent unfixed strays from moving in until a space is opened up through the death of a resident cat in the colony. In some cases, the feral cat colony is assisting with local rodent control, and a healthy colony will be more efficient at this task.

Are feral cats dangerous?

Feral cats are wild cats, and even kittens will scratch if scared or cornered. And cat scratches, even from a house cat, are something to avoid. People who want to help with feral cats are welcome to contact the Quadra Feral Cat Group rather than try to catch cats themselves.

Why not trap and euthanize?

These are animals that would otherwise be family pets. Research indicates that combining a population management program and public education is the only humane and proven method for reducing feral cat populations over time.

But these cats kill songbirds.

Any outdoor cat, pet or feral, hunts. By working to reduce the feral cat population through a proven method, and by encouraging people to prevent unwanted litters of kittens, Quadra Feral Cat Group is helping birds too. A managed feral cat colony is an improvement over the current situation that makes things better for the feral cats, pet cats, people and wildlife.

How can I assist feral cats?

Encourage people to spay and neuter pets - and never ever abandon pets.

Unwanted pets are much better off with the SPCA.

People can also volunteer to be part of the Quadra Feral Cat Group's efforts, help with funding or contact the group if they can adopt a healthy fixed family cat or kitten, or make room for a barn cat that will keep to itself.